

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS OF TEACHING CLASSES WITH BLIND STUDENTS

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Annotation: Teaching a foreign language seems both exciting and challenging at the same time. The number of blind students in the classes throughout Uzbekistan has increased recently because of the opportunities that have been created for the learners in educational settings. It is true that working with students who have special needs require teachers a lot of effort and hard work. This article outlines some challenges that foreign language teachers may face while working with blind students in English classes. It also suggests several solutions to those problems mentioned related to collaborating with blind students.

Key word: Blind students, visually impaired, vision, visual learning, tactile learning

There are one or two things teachers who are not trained to teach the blind may need to know before they can be an effective teacher to a blind student. First and foremost, the teachers have to understand the visual condition of their blind student. The teachers do not need to understand the medical implication of the blind student's blindness, just how much residual vision he or she has. Is he or she totally blind? Whatever amount of residual vision that is left of a blind person should be utilized to the maximum. So students with partial vision should be encouraged to read big print books. The next thing to do is to learn the background of the student. How and when he or she became blind. If the blind student became blind when he or she was, for example, at the age of eight or nine, he or she has certain visual memory. He or she will conceive ideas and images differently from someone who was blind at birth. When confronted with a totally blind student do not despair. Read teaching material to the blind student and get him or her to Braille the material before lessons [1]. Textbooks could never be brailled in time for my blind students. I always had to cope with one chapter at a time. But from my experience I can say that setting up a reader's service for the blind is never too difficult. Just spread the word that there is a need for a pool of volunteers to read books into tapes or to blind students and there will be many volunteers. Also, nowadays there is computer software that is able to download material and transcribe it into Braille dots. The machine for brailing out the dots is quite expensive though. Not knowing Braille is the least problem of teachers who are not specially trained to teach the blind. Technology can overcome that problem. Blind students can be trained to use the computer. There is sound synthesis software such as text to speech and voice recognition that can be installed on the computer. This software varies in price, but there are a number of programs which can be downloaded for free. When in the classroom the blind student cannot see the board so the teacher has to be more vocal and say out every word he or she puts on the board including direction of where the words are. For example, teaching the format of a letter say out, 'On the left hand corner

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of your page you write the address. The address of this college is number twenty-nine, Green Lane'. Remember the blind student cannot see the board but he or she can hear well. When plans or diagrams are used, you can emboss them for your students by sticking string to cardboard. Here teachers may have to use their ingenuity. I also tell teachers that the blind students in the class should not disrupt the lessons too much, meaning that the teacher should carry on as usual except for slight adjustments. Having a blind student in the midst of sighted students brings out the best of the sighted students [2].

Having a student with special needs in the classroom is both challenging and rewarding for teachers and other students in the classroom. Knowing what to expect can be helpful, though many teachers learn a bit each day and become specialists through experience. Here are a few challenges that teachers may face with a VI student [3].

- student may have low self-esteem
- student may have low motivation
- student may feel that literacy is impossible
- teacher and/or student may not be familiar with accessible formats, such as Braille
- student may feel disconnected from peers
- student is unable to read gestures and body language
- teacher may have to modify own materials
- teacher or helpers may overcompensate

Visually impaired learners appreciate when teachers and peers treat them as equals in the classroom. Some of the activities teachers usually use in an ELL classroom, however, will need to be modified for a student with visual limitations. Teachers may find that the best thing to do is skip over a task or assign it to sighted students for homework. Here are a few tasks teachers should avoid during class time when visually impaired students are present [4].

- spot the differences
- describe one's surroundings
- match the vocabulary to the definition
- comment on the chart or diagram
- comment on or play with flashcards (unless large size for visually impaired)
- complete picture-based exercises
- fill in the blanks
- unscramble the words

Depending on one's teaching budget, there are many tools and aids that can be beneficial for VI students. These students may have some of their own mobility aids, including a cane, an electronic device, or even a dog. Here are some tools and devices that teachers may want to consider having available for VI language learners [5].

- screen readers
- touch screens with voice
- Braille devices
- MP3 players
- large print books
- magnified screens
- real objects

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- large wall charts
- podcasts

There are some tips for teachers who are working with blind students in the classroom [6].

- check in on them regularly to see if they need help, but only provide help they request
- assign a mobility helper if needed
- speak directly to the VI student, not an assistant
- minimize background noise
- eliminate physical objects in aisles and doorways and reduce overall clutter
- highlight all main points of a lesson orally
- identify name of student who is speaking
- share videos ahead of time so that VI learners can preview
- provide a larger work space or table to accommodate laptop or other tools.

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